

The Dark Root -Part 5

by Ludwig

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Chapter Eight

Jordan was sitting in a corner of his lair, mulling about the night's events. Right in front of him, pacing about the place nervously, was his second-in-command, a female vamp named Crystal. She was a cute petite woman of asian obvious asian descent with long strait dark hair. Her nails also were very long, some of them reaching almost two inches in size. Crystal had been a natural choice to replace Razor, after his unfortunate demise at the hand of their new queen. She was almost as old as he was and every bit as ruthless as most of the time. But right now, she was a nervous wreck. And she had good reasons to be. Since her return to their headquarters, queen Lilith

had already executed four of her subjects in her rage over the defeat she was dealt tonight. Jordan had managed to finally calm her down by promising that they would track down Angel and bring her his ashes within the hour.

But when they had gotten to the wounded vampire's lair, they discovered he was not alone there. Not only was he with his usual mortal cohorts, but the cursed Slayer was also there along with her friends, a group with whom she was said to have had enormous success against otherworldly forces. But even worse, the bandana man, the very man that had terrified him and Razor into retreat, the night they had met Lilith, was there as well. When the sun had set, their number was thirty strong. But now, after all the night's events, only twelve were left and that number inspired Jordan no confidence against such formidable foes. And the queen could be of no help to them, tired as she was from this night's ordeals. Things were definitely not boding well for the soon-to-be rulers of the world.

"What's taking so long?" Crystal asked. "They should have returned by now."

Jordan looked up at his lieutenant and rolled his eyes.

"Will you please sit down somewhere and relax? You're giving me a headache. They'll be back soon enough. It's not like this city is lacking in resources, you know."

"Oh like you should talk! Unlike us, you don't have any reason to fear her, Jordi. It's not like she's gonna kill you, since you're her lips to us. She needs you."

"You give me far too much credit, Crystal. If the queen decides I've outlived my usefulness, she'll do me in and just find another to replace me. The reason I'm not panicking is because there's nothing I can do about it—save perhaps to remain as useful to her as I can. And you should do the same."

The Asian vamp stopped in front of him.

"There's something else we can do," she said, pulling a stake out of her coat. "I have no intention of winding up like the others. She's still weak, so why don't we cut our losses and just kill her before she kills us all?"

The blond vampire simply shook his head in disappointment. Suddenly, Crystal's body started shaking. She screamed for a moment and then exploded all over the room. Jordan shielded his eyes from the falling debris and dusted his jacket.

"We don't because she has a very good hearing, my dear!" he said to the still floating ashes. After the dust settled, the door of the warehouse opened, signaling his people's return. He got up and went to greet them. The ten vampires were herding inside seven boys of age ranging between sixteen and twenty one. They were bound, gagged and all wore the same leather jacket bearing a yellow claw in the back. This identified them as members of a local gang called the gold talon.

"Excellent work, Gonzo!" he said to one of the vamps. "You're now my new second-in-command. Keep those two up here for food and

recruitment purposes and bring the rest down to her majesty."

Gonzo looked at his leader in surprise over the announcement of his promotion. He was about to ask what had happened to Crystal but then saw the pile of dust in the corner and kept his question to himself.

"Sure thing, boss," he concured. Then, the newly promoted vamp turned to his companions. "All right you guys, you heard the man. Lets go! Queen Lilith is waiting for her meal and she's not the patient type!"

"When you're done, assemble you men again for another sortie. We still have time to hit two other gangs before the night is out. If all goes well, this should replenishe our numbers, at least partly."

Jordan watched his vamps take the prisonners down to the queen and then, a few minutes later, watched them come up again, carrying the five shriveled corpses. He turned to the two remaining ganger, quivering in the corner but felt the queen's calling. He imediadly rushed downstairs and found her standing in the middle of the room. The blond vamp walked up to Lilith and kneeled before her.

"I have failed you, my queen," he said timidly, his eyes trained to the floor. "I deserve whatever punishment you will deem aproprate."

She placed her hand on his head, caressing his hair and rasped.

"Thats no excuse! Weâ€¦i should have been strong enough to kill them all for you." he insisted.

She rasped softly and placed a finger under his chin, brigning his eyes up to face hers.

"You are too kind with me, my beloved mistress."

Another rasp. Jordan frowned.

"What do you mean by that? How can you make me stronger than them? Angel is two centuries my elder and the Slayer is stronger than any vampireâ€¦save of course you."

Lilith released his head and raised her hands. With the talon of one, she cut open a wound in the palm of the other. She placed the bleeding hand in front of him. Jordan looked at it, then looked at her inquisitively. Gently, she placed her other hand behind his head and pulled his mouth to the open wound. When his the blood touched his lips, there was a tingling sensation. And the blood was oh so sweet. Sweeter than any he had ever tasted before. But as he was begining to enjoy the experience, she withdrew her hand. For a moment he wanted to force her hand back to his mouht but he fought that impulse. Besides, something else had caught his attention. He was feeling a strange sensation coursing his body, as if every part of him was somehow being energized. At first the sensation was painfull but it soon turned to pure rapture. Jordan felt rising in him, a power he never suspected was possible. He knew that his strenght had doubled in that instant and now, neither the bandana man, nor Angelâ€¦or even the cursed Slayer impressed him anymore.

"My queen!" he said turning to her. "Thank you for this wonderous gift you bestowed on me. With this new strenght,i will lead our troops to ultimate victory against our enemies. From this time forward,none will stand in your way. I only regret that it is too late to mount an assault tonight. But come tomorrow night,i will take our legion to the lair of this upstart worm that defies your absolute power along with his mortal dogs,and bring their borken carcasses back for you to feast upon. My queen!"

"You're who?"

The question Buffy practicaly yelled echoed everyone's surprise. Only a short while ago she had come to L.A. to lend a hand to her former boyfriend in what appeared to be a fight against a Master Vampire named Lilith. But now this entire situation was threatening to get way out of hand. First,she learned that this Lilith character was in fact the Dark Root of the vampire race. And now,they were getting this lesson of human history by a man than had apparantly lived through all of it.

"Listen,child." Cain answered. "If you're going to make me repeat everything twice,this is gonna be a very long night."

"Sorryâ€|its justâ€|i'm used to this supernatural stuffâ€|usualy. But thisâ€|is somewhat off the charted area. Its not everyday that someone walks up to you and say 'Hiâ€|i'm a biblical figure'."

"Yeah and from the old testament too," added Willow. "Which i always tought was the coolest part of the bible and all."

"Let me make sure you understand something here,young witch." Cain said,turning to her. "I'm not Mosus or Abraham. My contribution to the bible was to invent murder out of jealousy!"

He stepped back to adress the whole group.

"Now i did not come here to give out autographs. I'm here to enlist your aid in fighting the most ruthless creature that ever walked the earth. You said that you wouldn't do so unless i explained to you all where i fit into all of this. So now,i would apreciate it if there were no further interuptions while i continue with the story."

"Yes but i have a lot of trouble with it allready," said Wesley. "The story of the genesis is just thatâ€|a story. Common sense would dictate that human evolution spanned over tens of thousands of generations and not that man simply popped up on earth at the whims of God."

"If you feel more confortable believing your ancestor was an ape,be my guest," answered Cain. "Now,i'll ask you again; do you wanna hear this or not?"

He waited for a moment,looking around the room. When no one else appeared about to add something,he continued.

"Now,as i said,i was born of Adam and Eve shortly after they had been

cast out of Eden for eating the forbidden fruit. But even if we were forced to fend for themselves, God still watched over us every single day. You can imagine what kind of attention I was getting. I was the only child of the world and both my parents and God bestowed love on me in abundance. I never knew what life in Eden was but to me, this was paradise, this feeling of uniqueness and it lasted for years. However, it ended eventually when my young brother Abel was born."

"At first, I like the novelty of having a little brother I could play with. But then, I started to notice that everyone's attention was not all on me anymore. They didn't love me any less, mind you. They just loved my brother as much as they did me and this fact became a constant irritation to me. He was a kind and giving soul and always helped without thoughts of reward. I, on the contrary, had grown used to having everything and all my actions reflected that. I never did anything if there wasn't some sort of gratification for me. But despite that, Abel adored me and I think that this was the thing that irritated me the most. Eventually, my jealousy became hatred. Hatred for God because he could love someone else as much as me. Hatred for my parents because they took away my uniqueness when they gave me a brother. But most of all, hatred for Abel because I saw him as the source of all my anguish."

"I grew up to cultivate the land and grow wheat while Abel became a shepherd and tended to flocks of lambs. One day, God asked us to make a sacrifice to him, as a show of devotion. My brother brought forth his most favored lamb and offered it to God. But I thought the whole thing was a ridiculous waste so I brought forth only my surplus wheat that I would not need anyway. God looked favorably on Abel's sacrifice but not on mine. When I complained about this, God asked why I was angry. He told me that if I did the right thing, I would not feel anger. He also warned me that if I opened my heart to sin, then sin would enter it."

"I was furious and the next day, I lured Abel to the field with me where I accused him of trying to steal all of God's favor. When he denied it and told me that he loved me, as did God, that was the final straw. I picked up a rock and beat him to death right there. Then I buried his body in the field to hide the evidence of my crime. But my rage did not disappear with the death of Abel. I was ready to kill my parents as well, to insure that I would be the only one left. That way, I selfishly believed that God would love only me and no one else."

"However, God summoned me in his presence and asked where my brother was. I, of course, denied knowledge of his whereabouts but he already knew what I had done. God said I had committed a grave sin against him and that, as punishment, I would be banished from the land, unable to ever grow anything ever again, and cursed to wander the earth until the end of time, to reflect upon my crime. He also placed a mark on me," Cain continued while patting his forehead. "decreeing that all who saw it would know me for the murderer I was."

"But even then, I complained about the severity of my punishment, saying that it was too harsh and that I would seek out other men so they would know me and kill me. However God declared that it would not be so. He decreed that on any man who tried to kill me, his vengeance would be visited sevenfold. Later, I discovered that this meant anytime I was to die, seven people, namely my would be

assassin and those six people closest to him,would die in my place. Lastly,God warned me against having any children because he said they would never know any peace or happyness. Upon hearing my sentencing,i cried in anguish and fled into the wilderness where i lived among the beasts of the land for centuries."

Cain looked at the young people gathered around him to gage their reaction so far. Not suprisingly,they were all staring at him in mild shock mixed with disgust. They had all heard this story before but hearing it told by the very perpetrator was another thing altogether.

"So you actually thought that if you killed everyone else,God would have no choice but to make you his favorite boy again?" Xander asked in disbelief. "How sick is that?"

"Extremely sick and twisted," said Cain. "My reasoning was that God would be angry at first but would eventually come around. Back in those days,my selfishness knew no boundaries. I believe that this selfishness was the reason for how hard God punished me far more than the actual death of my brother itself. And when i killed him,i felt no remorse whatsoever and that hurt God in a way that only a father can understand as i was to learn later on."

"And what about now?" Buffy asked suspiciously. "You said you thought God was being hard on you. Do you still feel that way now?"

Cain looked at the Slayer in silence for a while before answering.

"No. No i don't anymore. I got what i richly deserved. I'm just sorry that so many people,Angel and yourself included,had to pay for my sins alongside me."

She frowned.

"What do you mean by that?"

"I was getting to that," he continued. "As i said,i spent a great deal of time in the wild and that mellowed my disposition a great deal. I was still selfish but to a much lesser degree. In the meantime,humanity had begun to spread across the world and their number was ever rising. They were mastering many crafts such as architecture,tool making and agriculture and i became curious of how they had evolved eversince i had left them. So i travelled to the land of Nod where i met a woman named Azayena who was not frightened at my approach. She saw the mark i bore and knew what it meant but despite this,we fell in love. I remembered the warning of God about my descendants but did not heed it and,shortly thereafter,she gave me a son,which i named Enoch. In the old language,that meant 'new beginings' for thats what he was to me."

"For the first time in my long life,i knew true happyness and all selfish ideas left my heart to be replace by joy. A few years afterward,my wife became pregnant again and gave brith to a daughter. I loved her as well but still most of my attention went to my son. I wanted him to have everything and i wanted to thank the whole world for giving Enoch to me. So i build a city,the greatest of its time and invited everyone to come and live there in peace and prosperity and safe from the beasts of the land. I named the city Enoch,after my

son and decreed that he would rule over it when he reached maturity. There, we lived in bliss for many years and i even forgot about my curse for a time. But as all thing down here, it eventually came to an end. My son was a born hunter and loved nothing more than to run the contryside and track down his prey. One day, however, he came upon the tracks of an animal he had never seen before and followed them. When he finally caught up to it to the beast, it attacked him ferociously. Being of my blood, Enoch was able to fight the beast off but not before it wounded him severely."

"What do you mean 'being of your blood'?" Angel asked. "Are you saying that your impressive strenght is notâ€|supernatural in some way?"

"Thats exactly what i'm saying. Aside from the mark i bear, nothing of me has changed since the day i killed my brother. This great fortitude i'm blessed with is natural to me."

"But how can that be if you say you're human?" the vampire continued. "Earlier, you demonstrated that you're even stronger than i am and, aside from the Slayer, i never encountered any human who could make this claim, let alone actually prove it."

"You have to understand that humans back then, although visually similar, were very different from their more modern counterparts. Their genes were pure and endowed with enormous potency. That translated into great strenght and agility, increased resilience to damage or diseases and extraordinary healing capabilities. It also meant that they were blessed with a very high natural longevity. Adam, my father, lived to be over nine hundreds years of age before he passed on and during all this time, he had many more children who also lived for centuries. That potency was vital to them, as they were to be the source of an entire race. As time went by, the human potency became more and more dilute with every new generation until it stabilized at the level that you know today. Being so close to the original source however, this potency still exists in me and it always will."

"But i digress here. Now as i was saying, Enoch was badly wounded by the beast but he still managed to return home. When i found him, he was weak from the blood loss so i brought him inside and went to the city to fetch the best healers i could find. One by one, they came to see my son and then to tell me that the wounds were fatal and that there was nothing they could do. But i refused to accept this. I would not loose my beloved son. So i left the city and went in the wilderness to see an old witch i had heard lived there in the hope she could help me save Enoch. The witch cast the bones and told me that the beast that attacked my son was in fact a demon. She said that there was a way by which i would not loose my son but that it would entail dire consequences. She told me that the only cure for Enoch was to make him drink the blood of a true immortal; namely, my own. Again, she warned me that there would be consequences to doing so but i ignored her warnings. All that mattered to me was for my son to be well again so i rushed back to his bedside."

"When i finally got back shortly after nightfall, Enoch was on the brink of death. Without waisting anymore time, i took a knife, cut a wound in my right palm and placed my hand over his mouth for him to drink the blood. And drink it, he did, voraciously, as he somehow knew that this was life for him. But then, his eyes went blank and he died

anyway. I buried him behind our household and cried his death for the rest of the night and the whole day that followed. I locked myself in my room and refused to see anyone, devastated that I was over Enoch's death. But after the sun disappeared that day, I saw someone walking in my garden. I got out of the house to confront the intruder but when I recognized him, my heart nearly stopped. Standing there in front of me, his body and clothes caked with dirt, was my son Enoch. I ran to my son and took him in my arms, overjoyed that I was. His skin was pale and cold to the touch but I dismissed this as a result of his entombment."

"I brought him inside and told his sister to help wash him while I went to the city to announce the good news. However while I was still in viewing distance of the house, I heard the screams of my daughter. I rushed back only to find her lying on the floor, dead. Her throat had been ripped out by a powerful jaw and her lips were covered with blood. I immediately realized what occurred there. My son had killed her and then, for some reason, had repeated the pagan ritual that I had performed on him to save his life. So once again, grief stricken, I buried my daughter next to where I had laid my son to rest the prior day. But even then, I was ready to excuse my son's crime and blame it on his dreadful experience with the demon. I was convinced I could reason with him and bring him back to the light. But my wife was seeing things more clearly than I was at that time. She saw that Enoch had become a creature of darkness and that there was no coming back for him. She told me that she would never forgive me for what I had done. That it was because of my selfish heart, who simply could not let Enoch rest in God's embrace, that she had lost not one but both of her children. And then she left me there, and I never saw her again after that day."

"I waited there, sitting in a dark corner of my now empty home, hoping that Enoch would return to me, as he had the night before. But when he finally came back, shortly after nightfall, he was not alone. Standing at was my young daughter, now a living dead as he was. And it was at that moment, staring in horror at those abomination I had once called my flesh and blood and remembering the warnings of the witch, that I understood at last the terrible depth of my mistake. Only this time, it was not just on me, but on the world as a whole that I had unleashed this dire consequence. This plague called vampires."

The entire group remained silent for what seemed like an eternity, struggling to process all this information. It was Wesley that finally spoke again.

"You know—|heum, Cain—|I'm still not even used to that. While this is certainly a fascinating tale—and it does clarify a few things that some of us may have wondered about at some point but—|how exactly does it relate to our situation?"

Cain frowned.

"What? Didn't I tell you?"

"Tell us what, exactly?" Buffy asked.

"About my daughter. Her mother, being as close to her as I was to Enoch, was the one who chose her name. She called Liliantha, after her grand mother. Three guesses as to what the short for Liliantha is."

"Lilith!" answered Angel. "She's your daughter! But that would make over ten thousands years old! Master Nest wasn't even half as old as her and he was nearly unbeatable."

"I think it actually gets worse than that,Angel." declared Wesley. "It is my understanding that when a human being becomes a vampire,his strenght,agility and resilience are roughly tripled."

The vampire nodded in agreement.

"Now as you said earlier,Cain,you are endowed with a vastly superior physical potential that most humans,because of your proximity to the original source,and that the same was true of your children."

"That is correct"

Buffy jumped on her feet.

"Oh God!" she said. "I think i know what you're getting at,here. If anyone with such a high potential had been turned into a vampire"

Cain finished her thought.

"then they would become the most powerful tools of destruction this world has ever seen,surpassing in strenght even Seraphims and pure Demons alike. So now,perhaps you can all begin to appreciate the urgency of the situation we're facing here. Right now,our only chance is that she is probably still weak from her imprisonment. But every hour we loose brings her one step closer to regaining her full power. And if that happens and we can't stop her here,then,boys and girls,the devastaion following in her wake will make world war II look like a lover's spat!"

Xander placed his right hand in the air and stepped forward.

"All right then. So now everyone who thinks were all in way over our heads here,please raise your hand."

Everyone in the room imitated his gestureincluding,to his utter dispair,Cain himself.

Chapter Nine

Angel had spent the last hour reviewing his weapons in the basement of his office. There really was no need to,as he kept them in excellent shape,but it was a way for him to keep his mind occupied. The others had decided to take a few hours of break and Cordelia had offered to take the girls and Xander home with her so they could get a few hours of sleep. And from what Cain had told them last night,they would need to be well rested before the coming battle. The later was still sitting in the vampire's office upstairs and that was another reason why he was down there. Angel felt extremely uncomfortable around the strange man and with good reason. It was because of him that there were vampires on the world and he couldn't help wondering what his life might have been like if the man had just let his son die from his wounds.

—
But then again,would i have acted differently in his place? Would any of us have?

—
But there was something else too. Angel was used to being 'the oldest off the bunch'. Two hundred and forty years was a long time which usually gave him an edge over the people he met and he always kind of liked that about himself. But the sum of all his experiences were dwarfed by the massive longevity of Cain. The man had likely lived long enough to forget the amount of knowledge the vampire had accumulated several times over.

—
How do you relate to someone like that,who's literally seen it all?

—
He heard footspteps comming down the stairs and turned around to see that it was Wesley.

"Willow and Tara are back,Angel." annonced the later. "Cordelia has taken Buffy and Xander in town to get something to eat for everyone and they should be here shortly."

The vampire noddod and,without a word,returned to his inspection.

Sitting on a chair in Angel's office with his feet resting on the desk,Cain was playing with his small crystal plate and was lost in his thoughts. He was thinking about seeing Lilith for the first time in over a thousand years. Their last encounter had been less than cordial,to say the least. He was not afraid of her,any more than he had been of Enoch or any other demons and vampires for that matter. Being unable to die tended to have this effect on a person. But he dreaded the soon to come meeting with his daughter nevertheless. Back then,he had been unable to take the necessary steps to ensure that she would never threaten the world again. And ever since he became aware of her 'resurrection' a week ago,Cain had spent his time wondering if he could muster the resolve to finaly end it this time. And it was the 'not knowing the answer to that question' that scared him the most.

"What is that?"

The question startled him back to reality. Standing in the doorway to the office were the young witches Willow and Tara.

"What,this?" he asked,holding the crystal up. When the young red head noded,he handed it over for her to see. "Its called a crystal charm. Its sort of a chaneling tool for magical energies and it is used for many things. This one in particular was given to me by an african shaman and serves to locate those of my bloodline."

Willow and Tara both examined the crystal with great interest. It was cold to the touch and the edges of it were very sharp. The young witch handed it back to Cain.

"Those of your bloodline? You mean like Lilith?"

"Yes. But unfortunately, it also picks up every other vampire as well, since they are her descendants. And in a city like this one, with such a high concentration of them, it's almost impossible to track her with it unless she's close by."

"Does it do anything else?" Tara asked shyly. Cain looked at her in surprise.

"Wellâ€¦ I believe those are the first words I've heard from you since we met last night, young one"

The blond girl flushed and cradled near Willow, a reaction Cain noticed with interest. He smiled to reassure her.

"Don't worry, child. Unlike my daughter and her spawns, I don't bite. To answer your question, yes, the charm does have other functions. Among other things, it is said to bring good fortune and to serve as a stabilizing agent to the chaos that usually follows my passage."

Willow wondered what he meant by that but did not probe further.

"So," she said, changing the subject, "you have lived very long, right? I also remember you saying that it was a witch that gave you the, you know, 'cure' for your son. Are wiccas really that old? Because me and Tara here, we are, like, trying to become better witches and any help would be real neat."

"Humâ€¦ you and Tara here, eh?" he said, smiling

All of a sudden, the red head felt very uncomfortable, fearing that he might have picked up on their somewhat taboo relationship. It was true that Willow had grown closer to Tara ever since they met a few weeks back. They had a lot in common, being both witches in training, and lately, their friendship had begun to evolve beyond simple friendship. But neither young woman was ready to deal with it in the open as of yet.

"Wellâ€¦ yeah, me and Tara. What's wrong with that?"

"Absolutely nothing, Willow. Believe me, I am the last person on the planet in a position to pass judgement on how people should live or who they should feel attracted to."

Cain noticed the look of alarm on both their faces at hearing their secret exposed like that by a perfect stranger.

"But please, don't concern yourselves with this. I rarely speak with anyone as it is, and never about things that are none of my business."

"Thanks," Willow said. "But is it that obvious?"

"Obvious?" repeated Cain. " Well,not really,no. But as you pointed out earlier,i have lived for a long time and after a while,you get to pick up on those subtle details that most people dont see."

"But that does raise an interesting thing i noticed about the so called 'modern world' and how much it has difficulties getting rid of its old habits. Take you two for example; society frowns on the feelings you share even though there is absolutely no logical to. In the old days,things were much different. Back then,when the human gene pool had stabilized to its normal level,life became very hard. War,disease,famines all took a heavy toll on humanity and the average lifespan was rarely above fifty. And i'm not even mentioning the more supernatural menaces like vampires and demons here. The deck was stacked against civilisation during those times and the only way humans had to offset this was to procreate as much as they possibly could. Unfortunately,your kind of relationship pretty much flew in the face of that solution and as such was considered a threat to the very survival of the race. Thankfully,that is no longer the case now and yet,the prejudice remains,even though the situation that spawned it disappeared long ago."

"But what about you?" Willow asked. "You're an 'good old days' kinda guy. What do you think?"

"Me? Well,are you happy with one another?"

The two girls looked at each other with a smile and nodded.

"Then,what more needs be said?" Cain added. "Thats what i think."

They all heard the entrance door opening and saw Buffy,Cordelia and Xander come in carrying several bags. The office was instantly filled with the enticing aroma of chinese food. As they did,the small crystal Cain was holding started glowing all of a sudden. He quickly put it back in his pocket but not before Willow took note of this.

"We're back!" yelled Cordelia toward the stairs leading down to Angel's basement. "And we got enough food to feed the troops!"

They set the bags on a table and began unpacking them. Wesley came running up the stair and the witches converged on the food.

"Where's Angel?" Buffy asked Wesley.

"He said he had to go and speak with Kate Lockley,the police detective who first tipped us off about Lilith." Answered the former watcher. "He'll be back in an hour or so."

"Is there any kuan pow chicken in there?" asked Cain from his chair. "I've become a addicted to the stuff."

Everyone looked at him in surprise.

"What?" he made,rising to his feet. "I do eat,you know!"

"Well,i suppose you do," conceded Cordelia. "We got enough for

everyone anyway."

He came to join them and looked down at the table.

"Great! Now lets see what we got here."

"Not much really." Said Gonzo to his leader. "All we were able to pick up was a couple of squatters living in the neighboring buildings. Add to the the four gangers that we were able to keep from last night's forrays and that brings us up to twenty. Not really good odds against Angel and his Slayer pals."

Jordan pondered on the report he'd just receive. Those were not the news he was hoping to hear. Last night they had failed to kill the wretched vampire with an even greater numbers of vampires at his disposal and the element of surprise on their side. But still, Jordan was confident the odds could be beat. With his newly given strenght, he would be more than a match for both Angel and the Slayer. The trick was to make sure that none of their pesky friends would get in the way.

As he was planing the coming assault in his mind, Jordan noticed that all the other vamps were looking at him funny and in fact, they had done so all morning. True enough, drinking the blood of the Lilith did change him considerably. For one thing, he could no longer adopt a human guise and his eyes seemed to glow in the dark now. Not that these details bothered him in the least. And as for the uneasyness he inspired in the other vamps, he considered it an added boon. Jordan was used to humans being terrorised at the sight of him, but to have vampires fearing you as well, now that was a perk. The two things he was still unsure about was the constant tingling sensation he felt throughout his body and the fact the he no longer seemed to thirst for blood. The vamp leader actually like the taste of blood and the tingling was annoying, but he considered them small prices to pay for the power he now possessed.

"Neither the Slayer nor Angel will cause me much problems. I will kill them both with one hand!" he finally said to his lieutenant. The later winced when at hearing Jordan's new voice. It had a much lower tone than before and it sounded as though there were four of him speaking at once. Again, their leader noticed this and cracked a smile.

"What's the matter, Gonzo? You seem a little pale, my friend. Was it something i said?" he asked, smiling evilly. The vamp hesitated a moment before responding.

"Are you sure you're all right, Jordi? As far as i know, loss of appetite is always something to worry about."

Jordan laughed softly.

"As far as you know indeed. And thats not very far, is it Gonzo? Because if it were, you would understand that i am now beyond the petty rules of your existance. I was remade as an extention of the queen's power and the carrier of her will to her enemies. And as for appetite, well, she has more than enough of that for the two of

us."

"Yeah. Which brings me to the next thing we need to talk about. Since you're so close to her now, maybe you can convince her to ease up on the kills a little. I mean, we do all the work but barely get a few sips for our troubles andâ€¦"

Jordan suddenly struck his lieutenant across the face with the back of his hand, sending the poor vamp tumbling back several meters until he crashed into a wall. The other vamps all immediately backed away from him.

"Silence, dog!!" he yelled, balling his fists. "How dare you question the decisions of your mistress! If it weren't for her, you wouldn't even exist, you insignificant worm! You owe her everything you have as well as everything you are and if she chooses to let you starve, you will accept your fate with gratitude! Or would you rather join Ricco and Crystal into nothingness?"

Gonzo got up and rubbed his face.

"All right already! It was just an observation, no need to get your panties in a bind!"

Jordan made a low growl and returned to sit in a dark corner of the warehouse.

"If you're so concerned with stuffing your guttless beliefs," he said to all the vamps "then why don't you search the surrounding area again? Maybe you'll find a few rats, scurrying about. Now leave me be! I need to think."

The vamps complied with his suggestion and left him there to conceive the means that would lead them to their victoryâ€¦or to their ultimate demise.

At the police precinct, Kate was going out of her mind. For some reason that defied all logic, she had been stuck with a virtual truckload of paperwork all of a sudden. Old cases, disturbance complaints, unsolved crimes, everything was there. Most of these revolved around the unexplained and it seemed she had gotten a reputation for being interested in such cases. Which wasn't very far from the truth. Ever since she had met Angel, strange occurrences seemed to be coming out of the woodworks.

But her interest in these matters really peaked when her father was murdered by vampires just a few weeks before. Angel had claimed that he tried to help him but couldn't get in the house because her father refused to invite him in. Based on what she knew about vampires, it sounded plausible but some information she had gathered on his past did cast some doubts on his version of the facts. According to what she read, Angel was once known as Angelus and had committed countless particularly brutal crimes about a century ago. And for all his claims of being a different man, she found it easier to cling to the image of Angel portrayed as a monster, rather than a repentant soul.

She cleared her mind of the distracting thoughts and concentrated on

reviewing those reports so she would be done with them as quickly as possible. But then, something caught the corner of her eye and she raised her head to see the vampire, standing in the middle of the station. She got out of her chair and walked up to him.

"You know," she said, "i'm gonna have to have these sewer entrances walled up, so you stop sneaking in here like that."

"Nice to see you too, Kate." Angel replied.

She snorted and motioned him to follow her to her desk.

"So, what brings you by? Did you settle the case i brought to you the other day?"

The vampire shook his head.

"Not settled, no. But i know who's behind it. I've been tracking her for two days now and i'm confident that by tomorrow, this will all be over, one way or another."

"Her?" Kate repeated. "And who's 'her'? Another member of your charming family?"

"A very old member, as i told you yesterday. Last night, she laid a trap for me and almost did me in. She's a cunning old witch,"

"As you can see, i'm all teary eyes at hearing this," she said, sarcastic as ever. "So i guess that explains the disturbance reports we got from the north-east sector of town last night, huh?"

"Right! And also, your guy, Johnatan Doeherthy? I now know for a fact he's not our killer so you guys can stop looking for him."

"Really?" she said "So who is he then?"

"He's nobody you need to worry about, Kate. I'm sorry but i can't say anymore on the subject."

Inspector Lockley frowned but before she could place an objection, Angel continued.

"Also, i need you to make sure that your people stay out of our way tonight. We don't need them complicating things by getting in the way. Can i count on you for this?"

Her jaw dropped and it took her a while to regain her composure, stunned as she was by the vampire's words.

"Well you got some nerve, coming in here and telling me how to do my job!" she almost yelled at him. But then, noticing that her colleagues were now looking at them, she lowered her voice. "That's why you came to see me? To tell me to sit on my ass while you turn Los Angeles into your personal warzone?! Who the hell do you think you are?"

"Kate, there's no way to put this gently so i'll be blunt; you go out there tonight, you all get yourselves killed! It's that simple." Angel answered. "Maybe you even manage to take us down with you. I got a

taste of what she can do last night and believe me,i was lucky to get out of it in one piece. So i've gotten some reinforcements and we're gonna go at it again tonight but we can't afford any surprise here. This is a one-shot deal and if we fail,the whole city may wind up paying for it. Now i know that things have been strained between us ever since your father's death and i know that you don't like me of fully trust me. But please,trust me about this,i beg you!"

The detective looked at him long and hard,mesuring the weight of his request. Then,she rolled her eyes and sighed,which Angel took as a sign of victory.

"All right! I'm gonna leave this to you and your 'we' associates for tonight and i'll try and make sure that we don't 'get in the way'." she said leaning forward and pointing her finger at him "But come tomorrow,assuming you're still 'alive',you better fill me in on everything about this thing and i do mean everything,even if it takes us a week."

"Deal! And thanks a lot" he said as he got up.

"Yeah,yeah! Now get out of here! I do work for a living,you know."

Angel left her there and she returned to her tedious tasks of the day.

TO BE CONTINUEDâ€¦|

End
file.